



Reassembling the past: exploring the recent archaeology of Japanese ceramics production through creative ceramic practice

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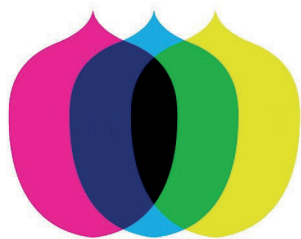
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i s r f b u l l e t i n

Issue XV

Site Responsive Archaeology

Between Place, Things, and People

Edited by Dr James Dixon

i s r f b u l l e t i n

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EDITORIAL	6
FROM THE DIRECTOR OF RESEARCH	9
NO EDGES: ARCHAEOLOGY, EXCAVATION AND LANDSCAPE	11
THE CUBE: A CINEMA ARCHAEOLOGY	18
MATERIALITY, CREATIVE RESPONSES AND REACHING DIFFERENT UNDERSTANDINGS OF KILMAINHAM GAOL IN DUBLIN	26
REASSEMBLING THE PAST	31
A RESPONSE FROM MARILYN STRATHERN	39
A RESPONSE FROM NISHAT AWAN	42

EDITORIAL

Dr. James Dixon

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This edition of the ISRF *Bulletin* is about archaeology. You will have a picture in your mind of what archaeology is, what it looks like. This may be a little different. The papers in this volume stem from those margins of archaeology that seek to do something *more* with archaeological practice than those perhaps more easily recognisable processes of excavation, analysis and formal reporting of objects, sites and landscapes.

Archaeology has developed over its history – about a century as a formal academic discipline, much longer as a field pursuit – a strongly practical approach to understanding the relationship between people and things over time. It involves excavating, surveying, drawing, measuring, and it also involves interpretation, writing, reporting, documenting, archiving, public engagement and the dissemination of findings. These are, alone or combined, the things we do and make, and it is the making and the doing of these things that makes us archaeologists.

As well as archaeological practice – whether physical or mental – there are archaeological sites. An archaeological site may be a hole in the ground or it may be a whole landscape. In common with other social sciences, the sites of archaeology may also be discursive and archaeologists are increasingly developing work with relevance to contemporary political debates. Here, that archaeological principle of working out from a solid, physical evidence base is applied to wider issues such as homelessness, local and global material networks, or urban regeneration. Typically, within this wider idea of where the *results* of our work are situated, the places and spaces we work in are our archaeological sites, and it is in and on sites that we *do* archaeology.

The notion of ‘site-responsive archaeology’ seems counter-intuitive. Don’t we always respond to whatever we find wherever we look? Well,

yes. But we do it using, for the most part, a suite of tried and tested practical, scientific and interpretive methods, applied as necessary. In short, we arrive on site with an idea of what we are going to do there, and because we have that idea, we also have partially-formed ideas of what the outcomes of our work will be; perhaps not the exact content of the report, for instance, but that there will be one, structured in a particular way. Truly site-responsive archaeology assumes that this may not be enough. Archaeological sites all exist in the contemporary world and archaeological engagement with any place will reveal something of the politics of that site today. To be site-responsive as an archaeologist is to allow a site to dictate the progress of its own investigation.

Firstly, this dictation will be about subjects and politics; the difference between what you thought this site meant in the contemporary world and what it turns out to mean when you start looking at it in detail and talking to people about it. Approaching a contemporary space as an archaeologist – or from any other discipline for that matter – it often becomes clear that there are certain things that space, or place, and its people need or want. If we decide to help, there may be ways that we can do so with archaeology alone, but we might also need to change our archaeology or ally it with other practices in order to help turn our objective investigation into a more subjective intervention.

After that, it becomes about practice and how we deal with those different politics and needs, which may not feel at first like archaeological concerns, for any number of reasons. Ultimately, site-responsive archaeology promotes a freedom to employ an archaeological practice that borrows heavily from other disciplines and that, at times, doesn't look like archaeology at all.

There are lots of ways to engage in site-responsive archaeology which, to some degree, all relate to multi- and inter-disciplinary working and thinking, whether or not this is overt. Multi-disciplinary work can be so because it is collaborative or because an individual is consciously working between different bodies of theory and practice. In the context of site-responsive archaeology, and of this volume, the importance of multi-disciplinarity is perhaps best expressed as the confidence to experiment; to *knowingly* go beyond the traditional bounds of your discipline as suits the needs of your site and its people.

EDITORIAL

This volume will demonstrate the successes of thinking in a site-responsive way as an archaeologist. The four papers presented here all show experiments in going beyond the traditional boundaries of archaeological practice as fits the needs of a particular site. All have resulted in doing something *more* through these multi-disciplinary, experimental, creative archaeologies.

We start with Oscar Aldred's thoughts on how sites affect archaeologists and how we might work differently, bringing other disciplines and non-archaeological forms of representation to site to better reflect the durational experiences of being an archaeologist in the field. We then move to Bristol and Angela Piccini's discussion of a recent project using an experimental archaeology workshop to work out what a popular cultural space means in advance of its alteration. Laura McAtackney's work at Kilmainham Gaol in Dublin juxtaposes a graffiti survey with her own participation in a performance work, bringing the two together in creating new public understandings of what is a traditional heritage site. Finally, Chris McHugh, a ceramic artist with a background in archaeology, approaches the declining ceramic production town of Seto in Japan with an archaeological approach to analysis, but with his own artworks as the result.

Site-responsive archaeology could be theorised ad nauseam and I am close to that point here. Suffice it to say that in addition to all the traditional pursuits of any discipline, there are ways of using those established practices and ways of thinking to do other things. *Sometimes*, those things involve intervention in the contemporary world. *Sometimes*, they need to be enhanced, or allied with other disciplines. *Always*, we learn more from experimenting than from not experimenting.

FROM THE DIRECTOR OF RESEARCH

Dr. Louise Braddock

Without having had any input into the choice of topic for this *Bulletin*, itself the successful outcome of inviting James Dixon as guest editor, I am struck by the marked parallels with psychoanalysis. In the issue he has compiled here we see a number of shifts in method and metatheory: the shift 'back to the present'; the necessarily interpretive dimension of observation; the shift to interaction as the mode of engagement with the 'object' of study.

These are, doubtless, shifts that are part of a more general epistemological re-orientation in the human and social sciences; at the same time, the parallels with psychoanalysis are intriguing. It was James Symonds, whose archaeological thoughts closed the ISRF's last Annual Workshop and whose voice then reappeared in the ensuing *Bulletin*, who drew my attention to a similarity that archaeologists perceive with psychoanalysis or, more precisely, with psychotherapy conceived on classical lines as the interpretive un-doing of the effects of the repressed, the lost or hidden past, on present behaviour. The word 'classical' also reflects the fact that from the outset Freud incorporated and indeed partly built his psychology around the metaphor of an archaeology of the mind with such notions as trace, inscription, layers, evidence, archaicism, and the enduring formative effects of past structures.

But what is more striking here is the parallel to the transformation in archaeology's self-understanding traced for us by James Symonds, and documented for us in this *Bulletin* by James Dixon. Archaeology and psychoanalysis have both moved on in the 120 years since Freud began to formulate his ideas and the practice of psychotherapy has changed along with its parent psychology. Psychoanalytic interpretation has come more definitively to focus on the 'here and now' of the transference, where the patient's 'past' is re-presented or manifested in the relation with the psychoanalyst. And in a development

REASSEMBLING THE PAST

Exploring the recent archaeology of Japanese ceramics production through creative ceramic practice

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Introduction

In November-December 2015, I was ceramic artist-in-residence as part of the Seto International Ceramics and Glass Art Exchange Programme. The city of Seto is a traditional ceramics centre near Nagoya in Japan and pottery has been made there since at least the 13th century. The hills around Seto are dotted with some 500 Muromachi Period (c. 1336-1573) kiln sites and, although the city is past its economic heyday, it remains an important centre of both industrial and craft production. In this illustrated paper, I will discuss my ongoing engagement with the site, which aims to explore the recent past of ceramics production through creative ceramic practice.¹ In doing so, I hope to show how my approach to the site is mediated through an appreciation of ceramics gained as both a maker and as someone with a background in archaeology.

The present is experienced as a palimpsest of the material remains of a profusion of pasts and this 'patchwork'² of material juxtapositions is particularly evident in Seto. Decaying wood and corrugated metal buildings (sometimes still occupied) exist alongside contemporary ferro-concrete constructions, and the products and by-products of the ceramics industry both intentionally and incidentally form the fabric of the city. Obsolete saggars have been repurposed into ornamental walls, while heavy rain regularly unearths broken sherds and ceramic

1. See McHugh, Christopher (2017) Ceramics as an archaeology of the contemporary past. In: *The Ceramics Reader* (Kevin Petrie and Andrew Livingstone (eds)). Bloomsbury Academic, pp. 536-547.

2. Olsen, B. (2010). *In defense of things: archaeology and the ontology of objects*. Rowman Altamira. p. 108.

components in the many empty plots.

My ceramic artworks echo this stratification of time and material through a process of collection, collage and (re)assemblage. These pieces incorporate photographic imagery with found ceramic objects and casts taken from reanimated plaster moulds. Although collage is often associated with the temporary and ephemeral, by firing photographs onto the ceramic surface as digital decals, I am attempting to document the site's changing materiality in a 'semi-durable'¹ medium. This process materialises digital information, making it literally 'graspable'.² While the recent history of ceramics production in Seto is often regarded as being too much a part of lived memory to be worthy of archaeological investigation, this is a significant, yet threatened, heritage resource. These overlooked remnants offer important insights into embodied knowledge and material histories of labour, consumption and archaeological deposition. My works aim to pay homage to and raise awareness of these silent material stories.



Figure 1: The excavated site of the 14th Century Konagaso kiln.



Figure 2: A revetment made from kiln furniture and old saggars.



Figure 3: Rain-exposed sherds and bisque doll limbs in an empty plot, November 2016.



Figure 4: Waster teapots, presumably used as shoring.

1. Pennell, S. (2010). "For a crack or flaw despis'd": Thinking about Ceramic Durability and the "Everyday" in Late Seventeenth- and Early Eighteenth-Century England', in Hamling, T. & Richardson, C., *Everyday Objects*. Ashgate, p. 40.

2. Connerton, P. (2009). *How modernity forgets*. Cambridge University Press. p. 124.



Figure 5: A still occupied wooden and corrugated metal building, November 2016..



Figure 6: Life amongst the sherds.

Site, maker and artwork as assemblages

Jane Bennett's conceptualisation of assemblage¹ is useful in explaining the process through which I have engaged with Seto as a site and responded by bringing into being a new body of ceramic material. She argues that complex processes and phenomena are the collective result of the 'confederate agency of many striving macro- and microactants' which sometimes coalesce to form assemblages of 'vibrant materials'. Here, assemblages are 'ad hoc groupings of diverse elements', 'living throbbing confederations' with their own life span.

Just as the city can be regarded as an assemblage of contingent geological, historical and cultural elements which led to the development of the pottery industry, my engagement with it as an artist with a background in archaeology is mediated through my own 'cluster' of memories, preoccupations and biological processes. The ceramic artwork I make is also a synthesis of various agencies, including my will as a maker, the sometimes non-compliant 'vibrant matter' of the clay, and the objects and contextual information gleaned from the site. In this way, the action of making involves a 'flow of the organic [human input] into the inorganic' clay, where 'The being of the potter is co-dependent and interweaved with the becoming of the pot'.²

1. Bennett, J. (2009). *Vibrant matter: A political ecology of things*. Duke University Press. pp. 23-24.

2. Malafouris, L. (2013). *How things shape the mind*. MIT Press. p. 21.



Figure 7: No longer used plaster moulds in a ceramic figurine factory, November 2016.



Figure 8: Ceramic figurine components.



Figure 9: Ceramic figurines stored as an archive of production.



Figure 10: Abandoned plaster moulds gradually deteriorating.

Alfred Gell described a china dinner set, typical of that made by Spode, Wedgewood or, indeed, one of the Seto potteries, as a series of objects, each with their own 'micro-histories', which come together to form a 'distributed object' manifesting the 'intentional actions' of the factory's management and design team.¹ Gell further contended that there is an 'isomorphy of structure' between the 'internal' cognitive world of the artist and the way it is manifest externally as the artist's oeuvre of 'spatio-temporal structures of distributed objects'.² Following from this, he argues that 'what people are externally (and collectively) is a kind of enlarged replication of what they are internally'.³ Here, humans are not confined to the spatial or temporal limits of their body, 'but consist of a spread of biographical events and memories of events, and a dispersed category of material objects, traces and leavings, which can be attributed to a person and which, in aggregate, testify

1. Gell, A. (1998). *Art and agency: an anthropological theory*. Clarendon Press. p. 221.

2. *ibid.* p. 222.

3. *ibid.*

to agency and patienthood during a biographical career which may, indeed, prolong itself long after biological death'.¹ Accordingly, a work of art or craft can be seen to embody something of the mind and will of its maker, designer and commissioner. This, in turn, may go on to influence others.

By repurposing and appropriating found ceramic objects and collaging photographic imagery, I am blending my own agency with that of the unnamed managers, designers and labourers of Seto in a material dialogue which results in a further assemblage of 'distributed objects'. Collage and assemblage, through their dislocation of time and place, have often been used to document historical change. According to Diane Waldman (1992, 11), collage imbues a work of art with 'several layers of meaning: the original identity of the fragment or object and all of the history it brings with it; the new meaning it gains in association with other objects or elements; and the meaning it acquires as the result of its metamorphosis into a new entity'.² Discussing Joseph Cornell's artistic preoccupation with 'the remnants of human use, weathering, and craftsmanship', Waldman argues that such fragments, when used sparingly, have the power to 'suggest the universe'.³ My incorporation of bisque dolls' limbs, and the use of sprigs taken from found ceramic figurines, in the *Setomonogatari* series of ceramic works marks my attempt to 'monumentalise and ennoble'⁴ the original forms, while maintaining something of their whimsy.

Figure 11 (left)

Setomonogatari 1 (2015),
porcelain, decals.

Figure 12 (right)

Setomonogatari 4 (2015),
stoneware, porcelain,
decals, mixed media.



1. *ibid.*

2. Waldman, D., & Matisse, H. (1992). *Collage, assemblage, and the found object*. London: Phaidon. p. 11.

3. *ibid.* p. 215.

4. *ibid.* p. 312.



Figure 13 (above): *Setomonogatari 5* (2016), porcelain, decals, glass, mixed media.



Figure 14 (t-r): A detail of *Setomonogatari 5* showing the inclusion of recovered bisque doll components and ceramic flowers.



Figure 15 (right): *Setomonogatari 6*, porcelain, decals, glass, mixed media.

Touching the past

It is both the fragility of ceramic objects as well as the ultimate durability of their sherds which makes them 'our most reliable evidence of human endeavour', providing 'a cultural trace that transports a sense of immediacy across the centuries'.¹ Such traces of the past have a 'lingering' or 'haunting power' which remains latent until they are rediscovered.²

John Harries (2017, 123) has described the 'intimate sense of communion' he felt with the Beothuk makers of the stone bifaces he

1. Adamson, G. (2009). 'You Are Here', in de Waal, E. *Signs and Wonders: Edmund de Waal and the V&A Ceramics Galleries*, V&A Publishing, p. 36.

2. Lazzari, M. (2011). Tangible interventions: The lived landscapes of contemporary archaeology. *Journal of Material Culture*, 16(2), p. 176.

discovered on a beach in Newfoundland.¹ This closeness to the past came not from feeling the 'ghostly' presence of the maker, but from the tactile realisation that the stone could be used as a tool in his own hand.² This touch led to a compression of linear time, facilitating a 'bodily communion with other lives, normally held distant and absent with topological time'.³ Encountering discarded plaster moulds and collecting rain-exposed sherds and the limbs and torsos of unfinished bisque dolls, afforded me a similar material empathy with the potters in Seto. Through the ceramic fragments, I could feel the absent presence of their makers. By reusing the moulds to slipcast new ceramic objects, I was able to understand the material affordances of these tools at first hand. The moulds 'instructed' use through their materiality and form⁴, enabling a reiteration of production and constituting a store of memory as both material witnesses and facilitators of tacit practices.



Figure 16 (above): The abandoned moulds I repurposed to make components of *Setomonogatari 4*.



Figure 17 (t-r): Unfired clay flowers slowly deteriorating.

Figure 18 (right): A ceramics factory being demolished, November 2016.



1. Harries, J. (2017). A stone that feels right in the hand: Tactile memory, the abduction of agency and presence of the past. *Journal of Material Culture*, 22(1), p. 123.

2. *ibid.* p. 125.

3. *ibid.* p. 126.

4. Olsen, B. (2010). *op. cit.* p. 210.

Conclusion

This process of collection, collage and reassemblage is itself a proactive contribution to the archaeological record, resulting in a body of work which has the potential to endure and go on to be experienced as the past in the present. As such, it is necessary to consider how this material might be read or experienced in the future. The ability of the mould or the biface to convey a sense of proximity to the past comes from our ability to imagine using them as tools. As sculptural objects, my works do not function in this way. Instead, they stand as necessarily imperfect attempts to record through form and imagery something of how I encountered the site of Seto as an assemblage of a multitude of pasts experienced in the present. Once fired, this digital and analogue information, which testifies to my lived experience, is committed to memory through a 'fossilisation or fixing of a moment'¹, where time becomes 'enfolded into matter'.² In collaging and reassembling imagery and indexical traces from a variety of contexts and periods, an attempt has been made to confound the linear time of historical narration by juxtaposing otherwise disparate elements. The artworks made during my residency were acquired by Seto City Art Museum and it is hoped that they will exist in this collection as a material testimony to my encounter with this city and community in flux.

1. Gormley, A. (2004). 'Antony Gormley in conversation with James Putnam', in Groom, S. (ed.) *A Secret History of Clay: From Gauguin to Gormley*, p. 85.

2. Harries, J. (2017). *op. cit.* p. 125.

SITE RESPONSIVE ARCHAEOLOGY: A RESPONSE

Professor Marilyn Strathern

ISRF Academic Advisor; Emeritus Professor of Social Anthropology,
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This stimulating collection, brought together by James Dixon, raises numerous questions for the locating and 'siting' of research material clearly not restricted to archaeology. So, I ask an anthropological one: what is the object of knowledge here? However, the archaeologists' examples are so illuminating that I first expand the question through a site they bring to mind. On the face of it, the site is thoroughly conventional (just the kind that some of the publics imagined here might think of): Kuk, in Highlands Papua New Guinea, a locale that has yielded substantial evidence of early agriculture, in one of the world's oldest regions of indigenous domestication.¹ The excavation leaves little to be seen, its nomination as a World Heritage Site resting in part on its present day cultural presence, the continued growing of ancient cultivars (tubers and bananas).

What is the object of knowledge here, and will that affect how the site responds? Clearly investigation will refract into as many objects of knowledge as a site throws up. A: The dig, the ground archaeologized – we know that yields excavation, methods of unearthing, recording. B: The findings, here evidence of early cultivation, extends the site into various domains of world knowledge, including techniques for analyzing entities (such as phytoliths) no longer part of site A. C: However, A reconceptualized by B lends itself to re-imagining a former landscape of receding forest, drainage ditches, mulching practices. D: When site D brings us into the present for heritage purposes, it

1. Golson, J., Denham, T., Hughes, P., Swadling, P., & Muke, J. (Eds.). (2017). *Ten thousand years of cultivation at Kuk Swamp in the highlands of Papua New Guinea* (Vol. 46). ANU Press.

may be discovered in today's gardens where crops are cultivated in the same way as they were in various phases of site C: knowledge is embodied in the practised hands of cultivators, distributed unevenly across the present population. Even to talk of that and site E rises in our path, a version of D, namely the creativity and skill imagined for the mind and hand of the archaeologist. Then again, E morphs into F, the archaeologist's social world, and the object of knowledge created in communicating any of these sites to diverse audiences.

Of course, thinking of a responsive site is a conceit; site-responsive archaeology is what this collection is about. Fascinating in many dimensions, it is especially intriguing apropos the authorial actor, the person carrying 'the archaeology' (site E). There are echoes of the way anthropologists have sought to theorize their presence in what they study - inside or outside the field - precisely in order to make an object of knowledge, an artefact, out of it.

I have drawn these notional sites from the papers as a whole, and briefly play them back again, as so many artefacts. While Dixon starts with a depiction of the places and spaces where archaeologists work, it is clear that this is as much a register of site E as of site A. And within E's purview, site B seems both separated off as the results of work and an anticipated horizon for it. Aldred's imagination of site as part of landscape merges the temporal distinction between sites C and D. Simultaneously his inhabitation (site E) performs a very particular sensory and intellectual experience. In attempting to grasp the materiality of communicative practice, Piccini and her co-authors are exploring site F as much as E. The diverse ways through which impressions and traces may become a common object (of knowledge) involve the notion of a future life analogous to that of heritage. The point is developed by McAttackney, with respect to what is already such an object in the past: imprisonment in gaol. The gaol is newly discovered for the material traces that this object has left, that is, it is freshly unearthed as a site A, a condensed version of what is known of the accompanying history (potentially a new site B too). Finally, McHugh renders down an archaeologist (the finder of potsherds, an element of A) into an object of knowledge through his own artifacts, the built ceramics that re-enact assemblages from the past. These are a bit like site D in deploying material continuity with the dispersed

PROFESSOR MARILYN STRATHERN

persons of the potters; a bit like B, a matter of results or findings, in a kind of reverse embodiment, compressed into alien forms.

My alphabetic categories are playful. But perhaps, by asking how we think about the objects of knowledge presented in this bulletin, something of the energy and innovation behind these sitings will have been captured.

SITE RESPONSIVE ARCHAEOLOGY: A RESPONSE

Dr. Nishat Awan

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The articles in this issue all deal with the intricate relationship archaeologists develop with a site, whether through proximity to the earth, through a relationship with objects, or in the process of uncovering past histories. Site here is understood in all its complexity, spanning across different times, including the objects that are found there, but crucially also the relationships that are made within and across the site. As an outsider to the discipline, I can only comment with reference to my own background as an architect, where we also consider a site's past, present and future through the relationships that it makes or has the potential to make. In the move from architecture understood as built object to architecture being understood as produced through a set of social relations, or more radically still architecture understood as social relations, the definition and boundary of a site is exploded.^{1,2}

One of the first moves, coming from a feminist perspective on architecture, was to reimagine site as location.^{3,4} This meant approaching the site from particular perspectives, such as that of the people who might use it or the various claims upon it, legal or otherwise. Yet, if we were to follow all such connections across a site it would expand infinitely, much like Borges's story of the cartographers who made a one-to-one map of their world.⁵ So, one of the crucial

1. Petrescu, D., & Trogal, K. (Eds.). (2017). *The Social (re) production of Architecture: Politics, Values and Actions in Contemporary Practice*. Taylor & Francis.

2. Awan, N., Schneider, T., & Till, J. (2013). *Spatial agency: other ways of doing architecture*. Routledge.

3. Rendell, J. (1999). A Place Between. *Public Art Journal*, (2).

4. Jones, P. B., Petrescu, D., & Till, J. (Eds.). (2007). *Architecture and participation*. Spon Press.

5. Borges, J. L. (1998). On the exactitude of science. *Collected Fictions*. Translated by

questions to emerge in the discourse around socially produced architecture, is precisely that of re-positioning or re-imagining the edges or the limits of a site. This is a question of both inclusion and exclusion, making the notion of location itself problematic, not least because location often morphs into a question of the local. What are the local claims on a site, how do we involve the local community etc.? These are of course valid concerns, and ones that are addressed in some of the articles in this issue in relation to archaeology, but they hide within them the danger of becoming too local, that is of exclusion.

A productive way of working with this tension is through an understanding of site through Sara Ahmed's concept of orientation. In her book, *Queer Phenomenology*, Ahmed writes of how objects, relationships, the world itself, orientates us.¹ We follow lines and fissures laid out before us by others. She makes a distinction here between location and orientation. Whereas location is about fixity, orientation tells us where to go and in doing so can also restrict us. "When we follow specific lines, some things are reachable and others remain or even become out of reach. Such exclusions—the constitution of a field of unreachable objects—are the indirect consequences of following lines that are before us..."² It seems that traditional archaeology is very much located within the fissures of a site and its interpretations could be said to emerge from the very space and time in which they are located reflecting the prevalent concerns of the day. In reference to Ahmed's definition above, this is very much a following of lines that keeps one within the zone of the reachable, what could also be understood as an evidence-based archaeology.

In my understanding, what the diverse contributions within this issue are offering, is a move towards the field of the unreachable. If archaeology is a discipline and practice engaged in creating narratives, then site responsive archaeology may be asking not only the question of how you narrate a site, but also how you respond to the desires associated with that site in all its complexities, including the conflict that comes with this as one desire is given precedence over another. This, of course, brings politics into what could have previously been

Andrew Hurley. Penguin, p. 325.

1. Ahmed, S. (2006). *Queer phenomenology: Orientations, objects, others*. Duke University Press.

2. *ibid.* pp. 14-15.

considered apolitical. There are echoes of these debates within architecture also, where the idea of site-specificity, taken from art practice is reimagined as spatial agency, that is the transformative potential within spatial (architectural) practices that mobilise the needs and desires inherent within a specific place.^{1,2,3} It is a way of challenging the very use of architecture and it seems such questions are also of importance in archaeology.

1. Awan et. al. (2013) *op. cit.*

2. Vardy, S. (2009). Spatial agency: tactics of self-organisation. *arg: Architectural Research Quarterly*, 13(2), 133-140.

3. Kwon, M. (2004). *One place after another: Site-specific art and locational identity*. MIT press.

This issue features:

Oscar Aldred

Nishat Awan

Laura McAtackney

Christopher McHugh

Angela Piccini

Marilyn Strathern